

Louis Hennepin, the Franciscan

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LOUIS HENNEPIN, THE FRANCISCAN. FIRST EXPLORER OF THE UPPER MISSISSIPPI RIVER.

In the vast wilderness that intervenes between the western extremity of Lake Superior and the Upper Mississippi, there is a large and beautiful lake. Its shores are elevated and strewn with vast boulders, presenting the appearance of a deserted ball ground of the Titans. On the western side, a knife-like point extends into the lake, shaded by lofty pines. In the immediate vicinity is an island noted for the fertility of its soil, and which has been tilled by the aborigines, after their manner, for nearly two centuries. Surrounded by forests of maple, the marshes in the vicinity rank in the growth of wild rice, the clear waters the abode of an abundance of fish, its position a Gibraltar to foes, it is a place, above all others, desirable as a residence to the Indian. On the isle in this remote lake, two years before the mild and educated Penn conferred with the Indians on the banks of the broad Delaware, on the site of a portion of Philadelphia, there was an European, a captive among the children of the forest, who, in the grey robes of the Franciscan, was compelled to work with the women, and submit to all the treatment that the caprice of the chief dictated.

The individual had been well educated, traveled on the continent, officiated in the capacity of ecclesiastic on the battle-field and in public institutions beyond the Atlantic, had been the companion of the renowned La Salle in many of his adventures. It was Louis Hennepin, a Recollect Franciscan. Though his reputation was sadly tarnished by 303 some acts, it cannot be denied that he was a shrewd observer, and apt in the acquisition of the languages of the several tribes he visited in the New World. While his character cannot be admired, as long as the "voice of many waters" is heard at Niagara, and the Falls of the Mississippi, his name will be recalled by the historian.

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While he was a member of the first company of civilized men that visited the Mississippi above the mouth of the Wisconsin, and the first to name and describe the Falls of Saint Anthony, it was also in an edition of his book of travels, that the first engraving of the cataract at Niagara was presented to the world.

EARLY HISTORY.

The account of Hennepin's early life is chiefly obtained from the introduction to the Amsterdam edition of his book of travels. He was born in Ath, an inland town of the Netherlands. From boyhood he longed to visit foreign countries, and it is not to be wondered at that he assumed the priestly office, for next to the army, it was the road, in that age, to distinction. For several years he led a wandering life. A member of the Recollect branch of the Franciscans, at one time he is on a begging expedition to some of the towns on the sea coast. In a few months he occupies the post of chaplain at an hospital, where he shrives the dying and administers extreme unction. From the quiet of the hospital, he proceeds to the camp, and is present at the battle of Seneffe, which occurred in the year 1674.

His whole mind, from the time that he became a priest, appears to have been in "things seen and temporal," rather than in those that are "unseen and eternal." While on duty at some of the ports on the Straits of Dover, he exhibited the characteristic of an ancient Athenian more than 304 that of a professed successor of the Apostles. He sought out the society of strangers "who spent their time in nothing else but either to tell or to hear some new thing." With perfect nonchalance he confesses that notwithstanding the nauseating fumes of tobacco, he used to slip behind the doors of sailors' taverns, and spend days, without regard to the loss of meals, listening to the adventures and hair-breadth escapes of the mariners in lands beyond the sea.

VOYAGE TO AMERICA.

In the year 1676 he received a welcome order from his superior, requiring him to embark for Canada. Unaccustomed to the world, and arbitrary in his disposition, he rendered the cabin of the ship in which he sailed, anything but heavenly. As in modern days, the passengers in a vessel to the new world, were composed of heterogeneous materials. There were young women, going out in search of brothers, or husbands, ecclesiastics, and those engaged in the new, but profitable commerce in furs. One of his fellow passengers was the talented, and enterprising, though unfortunate La Salle , with whom he afterwards associated. If he is to be credited, his intercourse with La Salle was not very pleasant on ship board. The young women, tired of being cooped up in the narrow accommodations of the ship, when the evening was fair, sought the deck and engaged in the rude dances of the French peasantry of that age. Hennepin feeling that it was improper, began to assume the air of the priest, and forbid the sport. La Salle feeling that his interference was uncalled for, called him a pedant, and took the side of the girls, and during the voyage there were stormy discussions.

Good humor appears to have been restored when they left the ship, for Hennepin would otherwise have not been the companion of La Salle in his great Western journey.

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Sojourning for a short period at Quebec, the adventure-loving Franciscan is permitted to go to a mission station on or near the site of the present town of Kingston, Canada West.

Here there was much to gratify his love of novelty, and he passed considerable time in rambling among the Iroquois of New York, even penetrating as far eastward as the Dutch fort Orange, now the city of Albany.

JOINS LA SALLE'S EXPEDITION.

In 1678 he returned to Quebec and was ordered to join the expedition of Robert La Salle .

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On the sixth of December, Father Hennepin and a portion of the exploring party had entered the Niagara River. In the vicinity of the Falls the winter was passed, and while the artisans were preparing a ship above the falls, to navigate the great lakes, the Recollect wiled away the hours in studying the manners and customs of the Seneca Indians, and in admiring the sublimest handiwork of God on the globe.

On the seventh of August, 1679, the ship being completely rigged, unfurled its sails to the breezes of Lake Erie. The vessel was named the Griffin, in honor of the arms of Frontenac , Governor of Canada, the first ship of European construction that had ever ploughed the waters of the great inland seas of North America.

After encountering a violent and dangerous storm on one of the lakes, during which they had given up all hopes of escaping shipwreck, on the twenty-seventh of the month, they were safely moored in the harbor of “ *Missilimackinack* .” From thence the party proceeded to Green Bay, where they left the ship, procured canoes, and continued along the coast of Lake Michigan. By the middle of January, 1680, La Salle had conducted his expedition to the 19 306 Illinois River, and on an eminence near Lake Peoria, he commenced, with much heaviness of heart, the erection of a fort, which he called Crevecœur, on account of the many disappointments he had experienced.

La Salle , in the month of February, selected Hennepin and two traders for the arduous and dangerous undertaking of exploring the unknown regions of the upper Mississippi.

Daring and ambitious of distinction as a discoverer, he was not averse to such a commission, though perhaps he may have shrunk from the undertaking at so inclement a season as the last of February is, in this portion of North America.

EMBARKS FOR THE UPPER MISSISSIPPI.

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On the 29th of February, 1680, with two voyageurs, named Picard Du Gay and Michael Ako, Hennepin embarked in a canoe on the voyage of discovery.

The venerable Ribourde , a member of a Burgundian family of high rank, and a fellow Franciscan, came down to the river bank to see him off, and, in bidding him farewell, told him to acquit himself like a man, and be of good courage. His words were, "Viriliter age et confortetur cor tuum." [Act manfully and be of stout heart.]

The canoe was loaded with about one hundred and fifty dollars worth of merchandize, for the purpose of trade with the Indians, and in addition La Salle presented to Hennepin ten knives, twelve awls or bodkins, a parcel of tobacco, a package of needles, and a pound or two of white or black beads.

The movements of Hennepin , during the month of March are not very clearly related. He appears to have been detained at the junction of the Illinois with the Mississippi by the floating ice, until near the middle of that month. He then commenced the ascent of the river for the first time by 307 civilized man, though Marquette had seven years before descended from the Wisconsin.

Surrounded by hostile and unknown natives, they cautiously proceeded. On the 11th of April, 1680, thirty-three bark canoes, containing a Dakota war party against the Illinois and Miami nations, hove in sight, and commenced discharging their arrows at the canoe of the Frenchmen. Perceiving the calumet of peace, they ceased their hostile demonstrations and approached. The first night that Hennepin and his companions passed with the Dakota party was one of anxiety. The next morning, a chief named Narrhetoba asked for the peace calumet, filled it with willow bark, and all smoked. It was then signified that the white men were to return with them to their villages.

HENNEPIN'S ATTEMPT TO PRAY.

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In his narrative, the Franciscan remarks:—"I found it difficult to say my office before these Indians. Many seeing me move my lips, said in a fierce tone, ' *Ouakanche* .' Michael , all out of countenance, told me that if I continued to say my breviary, we should all three be killed, and the Picard begged me at least to pray apart, so as not to provoke them. I followed the latter's advice, but the more I concealed myself, the more I had the Indians at my heels, for when I entered the wood, they thought I was going to hide some goods under ground, so that I knew not on what side to turn to pray, for they never let me out of sight. This obliged me to beg pardon of my canoemen, assuring them I could not dispense with saying my office. By the word ' *Ouakanche* ,' the Indians meant that the book I was reading was a spirit, but by their gesture, they nevertheless shewed a kind of aversion, so that to accustom them to it, I chanted the Litany of the Blessed Virgin in the canoe, with my book open. They thought that the breviary was a 308 spirit which taught me to sing for their diversion, for these people are naturally fond of singing."

This is the first mention of a Dakota word in European book. The savages were annoyed rather than enraged, at seeing the white man reading a book, and exclaimed, " *Wakan-de* !" this is wonderful or supernatural. The war party was composed of several bands of the Mdewakantonwan Dakotas, and there was a diversity of opinion in relation to the disposition that should be made of the white men. The relatives of those who had been killed by the Miamis, were in favor of taking their scalps, but others were anxious to retain the favor of the French, and open a trading intercourse.

Perceiving one of the canoemen shoot a wild turkey, they called the gun, *Manza Ouackange*—"iron that has understanding;" more correctly, *Manza Wakande* , "this is the supernatural metal."

ARRIVE AT LAKE PEPIN.

Aquipaguatin , one of the head men, resorted to the following device to obtain merchandise. Says the Father: "this wily savage had the bones of some distinguished

relative, which he preserved with great care in some skins dressed and adorned with several rows of black and red porcupine quills. From time to time he assembled his men to give it a smoke, and made us come several days to cover the bones with goods, and by a present, wipe away the tears he had shed for him, and for his own son killed by the Miamis. To appease this captious man, we threw on the bones several fathoms of tobacco, axes, knives, beads, and some black and white wampum bracelets. * *

We slept at the point of the Lake of Tears, which we so called from the tears which this chief shed all night long, or by one of his sons whom he caused to weep when he grew tired.

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DAKOTA METHOD OF OBTAINING FIRE.

The next day, after four or five leagues sail, a chief came and telling them to leave their canoes, he pulled up three piles of grass for seats. Then taking a piece of cedar full of little holes, he placed a stick into one, which he revolved between the palms of his hands, until he kindled a fire, and informed the Frenchmen that they would be at Mille Lacs in six days. On the nineteenth day after their captivity, they arrived in the vicinity of St. Paul, not far, it is probable, from the marshy ground on which the Kaposia band once lived, and now called "Pig's Eye."

The journal remarks, "having arrived on the nineteenth day of our navigation five leagues below St. Anthony falls, these Indians landed us in a bay, broke our canoe to pieces, and secreted their own in the reeds."

They then followed the trail to Mille Lac; sixty leagues distant. As they approached their villages, the various bands began to show their spoils. The tobacco was highly prized and led to some contention. The chalice of the Father which glistened in the sun, they were afraid to touch supposing it was "*wakan* ." After five days walk they reached the Issati (Dakota) settlements in the valley of the Rum River. The different bands, each conducted

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a Frenchman to their village, the chief *Aquipaguetin* taking charge of Hennepin . After marching through the marshes towards the sources of Rum River, five wives of the chief, in three bark canoes, met them and took them a short league to an island where their cabins were.

HENNEPIN AT MILLE LAC.

An aged Indian kindly rubbed down the way worn Franciscan—placing him on a bear skin near the fire, he anointed his legs and the soles of his feet with wild-cat oil.

The son of the chief took great pleasure in carrying upon his bare back the Priest's robe with dead men's bones enveloped. It was called Pere Louis Chinnien—in the Dakota language *Shinna* or *Shinnan* signifies a buffalo robe. Hennepin's description of his life on the island is in these words.

“The day after our arrival Aquipaguetin , who was the head of a large family, covered me with a robe made of ten large dressed beaver skins, trimmed with porcupine quills. This Indian showed me five or six of his wives, telling them, as I afterwards learned, that they should in future regard me as one of their children.

SWEATING CABIN.

“He set before me a bark dish full of fish, and seeing that I could not rise from the ground he had a small sweating cabin made, in which he made me enter naked with four Indians. This cabin he covered with buffalo skins, and inside he put stones red to the middle. He made me a sign to do as the others before beginning to sweat, but I merely concealed my nakedness with a handkerchief. As soon as these Indians had several times breathed out quite violently he began to sing vociferously, the others putting their hands on me and rubbing me while they wept bitterly. I began to faint, but I came out and could scarcely take my habit to put on. When he made me sweat thus three times a week, I felt as strong as ever.”

ASTONISHMENT AT COMPASS AND IRON POT.

The mariner's compass was a constant source of wonder and amazement. Aquipaguetin having assembled the braves would ask Hennepin to show his compass. Perceiving that the needle turned, the chief harangued his men, and told them that the Europeans were spirits, capable of doing anything.

In the Franciscan's possession was an iron pot with lion 311 paw feet which the Indians would not touch unless their hands were wrapped in buffalo skins.

The women looked upon it as “ *wakan* ” and would not enter the cabin where it was.

THE FIRST DAKOTA LEXICON.

Necessity soon forced the Father to compile a Dictionary, and children were his assistants. He writes, “As soon as I could catch the word *Taketchiabihe* (*Taku-kapi-he*) which means “what call you that,” I became in a short time able to converse on the familiar objects. At first this difficulty was hard to surmount. If I had a desire to know what “to run” was, in their tongue, I was forced to increase my speed and actually run from one end of the lodge to the other, until they understood what I meant and had told me the word, which I presently set down in my Dictionary.”

“The chiefs of these savages, seeing that I was desirous to learn, frequently made me write, naming all the parts of the human body, and as I would not put on paper certain indelicate words, at which they do not blush, they were heartily amused.

They often asked the Franciscan questions, to answer which it was necessary to refer to his lexicon. This appeared very strange, and as they had no word for paper, they said, “that white thing must be a spirit which tells Pere Louis all we say.”

CONVERSATION ON MARRIAGE.

Hennepin remarks: "These Indians often asked me how many wives and children I had, and how old I was, that is, how many winters, for so these natives always count. Never illumined by the light of faith, they were surprised at my answer. Pointing to our two Frenchmen, whom I was then visiting, at a point three leagues from our village, I told them that a man among us could only have one wife, that 312 as for me I had promised the Master of Life to live as they saw me, and to come and live with them to teach them to be like the French.

But that gross people, till then lawless and faithless, turned all I said into ridicule. "How," said they, "would you have these two men with thee have wives ? Ours would not live with them, for they have hair all over their face, and we have none there or elsewhere." In fact, they were never better pleased with me than when I was shaved, and from a complaisance, certainly not criminal, I shaved every week."

BAPTISM OF AN INFANT.

"As I often went to visit the cabins, I found a sick child, whose father's name was Mamenisi. Michael Ako would not accompany me, the Picard Du Gay alone followed me to act as sponsor, or rather to witness the baptism.

I christened the child Antoinette , in honor of St. Anthony of Padua , as well as for the Picard's name, which was Anthony Auguelle . He was a native of Amiens, and nephew of the Procurator General of the Premoustratensians, both now at Paris. Having poured natural water on the head and uttered these words: "Creature of God, I baptise thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," I took half an altar cloth, which I had wrested from the hands of an Indian, who had stolen it from me, and put it on the body of the baptised child; for as I could not say mass for want of wine and vestments, this piece of linen could not be put to better use than to enshroud the first Christian child among these tribes. I do not know whether the softness of the linen had refreshed her, but

she was the next day smiling in her mother's arms, who believed that I had cured the child, but she died soon after, to my great consolation."

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ARRIVAL OF DISTANT INDIANS.

"During my stay among them, there arrived four savages, who said they were come alone five hundred leagues from the west, and had been four months upon the way. They assured us there was no such place as the Straits of Anian, and that they had traveled without resting except to sleep, and had not seen or passed over any great lake, by which phrase they always mean the sea.

They further informed us that the nation of the *Assenipoulacs* (Assiniboines) who live northeast of Issati, was not above six or seven days journey; that none of the nations within their knowledge, who lie to the east, or northwest, had any great lake about their countries, which were very large, but only rivers which came from the north; they further assured us that there were very few forests in the countries through which they passed, insomuch that now and then they were forced to make fires of Buffaloes' dung to boil their food. All these circumstances make it appear that there is no such place as the Straits of Anian, as we usually see them set down on the maps. And whatever efforts have been made for many years past by the English and Dutch to find out a passage to the frozen sea, they have not yet been able to effect it. But by the help of my discovery, and the assistance of God, I doubt not but a passage may still be found, and that an easy one too, For example, we may be transported into the Pacific Sea by rivers which are large and capable of carrying great vessels, *and from thence it is very easy to go to China and Japan without crossing the equinoctial live, and in all probability Japan is on the same continent as America ."*